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REVIEWS

A review of two French productions about Rapanui
by Grant McCall
University of New South Wales

- ☉ *Easter Island. The interactive discovery of a legendary island*
Paris, Les Éditions numériques, 1996. FF 149
and

- 📖 Corinne Raybaud. *L'île de Pâques de 1862 à 1888, 26 années de Diaspora Pascuane en Océanie Orientale*
Collection Mémoire du Pacifique. 1996. Papeete, Editions JCR. PPF 2950

Imagine seeing Kiko on your computer screen, or Mundo Edwards speaking French, or photographs of houses, gardens and so on; all from Rapanui and all on a CD ROM, the newest publishing technology.

We are used to viewing encyclopaedias of varying qual-

ity, dictionaries and other reference works on CD ROM, even novels and, of course, the ubiquitous games. But a CD ROM on the Pacific? That's unusual!

Juniper Films (Sydney) published last year the very attractive *Pacifica: A cultural voyage*, which is a companion to their television series (now video collection) and book. It contains a game to grab student interest and a variety of video clips, derived from the videos. But a CD on a single island? I believe that Rapanui has the honour to be the first Pacific Island to have a CD entirely to itself, and a very stylish, versatile product it is too. The disk itself is a "hybrid", which means you can pop it into the CD ROM drive of most Windows or Macintosh computers and it will play. As well, the text, whilst based in French, appears in Spanish and English as well, with the narration automatically coming in those languages.

Readers of the *Rapa Nui Journal* will find nothing new to them in this reference work, but it is attractively packaged. We know Esperanza Pakarati, but now we can see her sing, and "la la" a couple of old Rapanui words her mother (Amelia Tepano) taught her, but she has forgotten. There is a section on common words in Rapanui, spoken also by Esperanza.

There are remarkably few errors on the disk, given its considerable complexity. The map calls a "hanga" a "hargá", but we know what it is. Whilst the images and information are authentic, for some reason the French authors have chosen Tamare music instead of Rapanui for some bridging bits. Too bad.

The disk is devised into three sections: Historical background, Exploration (the main sites) and Discovery. The latter section looks at life on the island today and includes some tourism and travel information. All the main sections are illustrated.

In the "Discovery" section, there are four sections, the first being "Life on the island" with high quality photographs, the story of the *toromiro* and short photographic essays on gardens and houses. Here is where the Rapanui language section is located along with a mysterious "Ceremonial music" presentation which is somewhat discordant. The section closes with "practical information", including a multi-lingual bibliography.

Anyone interested in Rapanui will find this French product a treat and a joy: Les Éditions Numériques are to be congratulated for the high standard of graphic design and reproduction. Further details may be obtained by visiting their website: <<http://www.lvi-press.com>>. My copy was only FF198, including postage to Australia, which is very reasonable for such a diverse quality product.

Corinne Raybaud's *L'île sacrifiée*, however, is not a quality product in terms of its production. I was unable to purchase a copy from the publishers in Tahiti, and resorted to that excellent mail order source for French material on the Pacific, Jean-Louis Boglio, in Australia. According to Boglio, each copy of *L'île sacrifiée* is pasted together slightly differently and with a slightly different cut of the paper. One of the two illustrations appears on the cover and between pages 72 and 73; the other is between pages 148 and 149. Both seem to have been done with a photocopier and are contemporary photographs of Rapanui young men in full dance paint. There

is a map of Rapanui after the title page, photocopied, re-touched by hand and unsourced, and one of the Pacific just after the table of contents similarly confected.

L'île sacrifiée seems to be a transformation of the author's 1993 doctoral thesis at the University of Paris X, Nanterre. The thesis is given as having 425 pages, whereas the published book just hits 225 pages. It follows the theme that the island was sacrificed to the greed of outsiders.

As outlined on the back cover, the island was sacrificed to Peruvian economic interests, then to the "evangelical fervour" of missionaries, followed by personal interests of agricultural developers and, lastly, to Chilean expansionism. Each of these four episodes forms a section of her text, the whole ending with a conclusion, epilogue and some appendices, mainly about the Peruvian episode and taken from, I think, *Le messenger de Tahiti*, the official journal of the colonial government there in the last century. The period covered is 1862 to 1888.

The author's bibliography is slight (16 entries) and quirky. It does not include books she credits herself with on the dust jacket: *French Oceanic Territories from 1914 to 1918*, *Easter Island from 1722 to 1888* or the "numerous articles" she claims to have published. Harry Maude is there, but so is Stephan Chauvet. Vergara is a good source, from which Raybaud translates slabs of text and there is Porteous. There also are missionary sources and Putigny's fanciful novel about Dutrou-Bornier. The author's listing of archival sources is impressive and includes some of the newspaper articles she came across. There are two private archives consulted that were unknown to me: Lord Alexandre Dunbar (Scotland) for the private correspondence of John Brander and one Manuel Diaz Gonzalez (Santiago de Chile) "who has more than 4000 documents about Rapanui". Many more sources are cited in the body of the text, even though they don't make it into the bibliography proper.

Raybaud should be judged, though, on how well she has exploited her sources in Tahiti, where she has been resident, the book tells us, since 1972. The first part summarises in French Maude's material about the Peruvian episode, drawing also on French sources published in Tahiti. As the coverage is very thorough and appears for the first time in a French published source, this gives value to the book, although citations to the original sources are few.

The next part, on the missionaries, follows Mouly very closely, telling the story of the tragic Eyraud and the forceful Roussel. As far as I can see, the Rome Archives and Mouly are the main sources here. I see no obvious reference to archives in Papeete, in which there are several references to Rapanui residents in Papeete. The circumstances of Pamata'i and the episodes with Father Celestin, are missing.

The final section is the annexation of Rapanui by Chile in 1888, as part of a grand colonial plan. This section begins with considerable detail of Dutrou-Bornier's life (pp. 130-165), and here Territorial Archives in Papeete seem to come into play including the French developer's activities whilst sailing around those islands. What is not highlighted is that it was only Dutrou-Bornier who realised how Rapanui could be commercially developed: as a place for boutique agriculture, with an eye to the market in Tahiti. The basis for coming to this conclusion is found easily in books by Henri Mager, cited

by Raybaud for other purposes. This is a pity for this third section is the most original in the book, with clear archive and literature references. This investigation of Dutrou-Bornier's motives, though, is the first serious study of this influential man, even resorting to French metropolitan archival sources rarely tapped by Pacific historians.

After Dutrou-Bornier, the author turns her attentions to John Brander very briefly, before considering brief biographies of some bizarre 19th century French adventurers in South America.

The dredging of French sources clearly is Raybaud's strong point. When it comes to the annexation of Rapanui by Chile, there is a scant ten pages, derivative from French sources. The author cannot decide whether the Chilean protagonist is Polycarpo or Policarpo Toro and alternates the spelling. Raybaud is mistaken when she writes in her Epilogue that "the island [Easter Island] fell into oblivion"; The Williamson Balfour exploitation of the island was very profitable, or they would not have stayed for over half a century. What fell into oblivion were the Rapanui themselves, as sheep roamed and Islanders were confined to pens.

So, with such detail, what can we say about Madame Raybaud's effort? As I mentioned above, the third part of *L'île sacrifiée* is by far the more professionally researched and written. It more resembles a scholarly piece of work, whilst the preceding parts are derived from existing sources in the main. In that respect, the book is similar to other books by French authors about the colony that got away (See Grant McCall, "French images of Rapanui (Easter Island)", *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 104 (2) 1995: 181-194).

But, given her two decades of residence in Tahiti, where is the fruit of that? Given she had access to the personal correspondence of John Brander, where is the detail? And, where is the fruit of Señor Manuel Diaz Gonzalez's more than 4,000 documents? These sources are not evident in *L'île sacrifiée*. Also, curiously absent is Patricia Anguita's MA thesis from 1986 (*La migration rapanui vers Tahiti et Mangareva, 1871-1920*). This thesis, which takes up some of the ground covered by Raybaud, but in an original and scholarly fashion, was supervised by Pierre-Yves Toullelan, whom the author of *L'île sacrifiée* says she consulted. Toullelan, a very enthusiastic scholar, would have mentioned Anguita and he has a copy of the work in his personal library. One can hardly say that Raybaud rushed into print, which she and her husband themselves produced.

Still, sifting through the material, *L'île sacrifiée* is worthwhile consulting for the historical material it does cite. It is a shame, though, that her clever theme of "sacrifice" was not carried through the text in the imaginative way that gallic academic writing can often do. It would have provided a focus for the work and given it more impact. Instead, chronology and a few personalities organise the text and provide its flow. In the bibliography, there are references to a few French texts on French colonialism, but there are only a few contextualising remarks about how the Rapanui episode fits into that broader picture. As Raybaud takes outsider ambition as the motivating force in her analysis, I would have thought that French government policy might have come into her analysis more. ■